Demystifying Sectarian Narratives of the Middle East after the Popular Uprisings

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ABSTRACT:

Sectarianism has dominated the Arab public sphere but also Western explanations of the violence across the Arab world after the popular uprisings. But can a strictly primordial narrative explain 1) the timing of the rise of sectarian identities in the Arab states, and 2) the geopolitics of the ME after the popular uprisings? In this lecture, I suggest that it cannot. Instead, I argue that the rise of sectarian modes of identification and mobilization have more to do with the collapse of the state's institutional and ideological power as a result of sectarianized geopolitical contests. Nor can sectarianism explain some puzzling anomalies shaping the geopolitics of the Middle East after the uprising. A fuller explanation of the latter entails factoring in realist and regime security calculations.

READING LIST:

Bassel F. Salloukh, "The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East," *The International Spectator* 48, 2 (June 2013), pp. 32-46

Bassel F. Salloukh, "How to break the Middle East's Sectarian Spiral," Washington Post, Monkey Cage Blog, 8 August 2016, at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/08/08/how-to-break-the-middle-easts-sectarian-spiral/

F. Gregory Gause III, *Beyond Sectarianism: New Middle East Cold War* Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper, 11 July 2014, at:

http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2014/07/22%20beyond%20sectarianism%20cold%20war%20gause/english%20pdf.pdf

F. Gregory Gause, III, "Ideologies, Alliances and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War," and Bassel F. Salloukh, "Overlapping Contests and Middle East International Relations," in *International Relations Theory and a Changing Middle East*, POMEPS, 17 September 2015, at: http://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/POMEPS_Studies_16_IR_Web1.pdf